

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

10 NOVEMBER 2021

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Insulating homes in Reading

Insulating homes is a triple win. Tackling poverty, cutting carbon and creating jobs.

Friends of the Earth estimate that in Reading 4000 existing homes per year need to be insulated up to a high standard to tackle the climate emergency. How many homes per year does the council estimate are being insulated?

REPLY by Councillor Davies:

I invite Councillor Emberson, the Lead Councillor for Housing, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Housing (Councillor Emberson)

I thank Cllr White for his question.

The Council does not have access to data on the number of retrofit projects undertaken on all housing in Reading. It is possible, however, to look at EPC data for the Borough as a proxy measure for the extent to which the energy efficiency of Reading's housing stock is improving or otherwise.

An analysis of the EPC data for the borough suggests that the overall pattern since 2008 has been that the EPCs lodged for properties graded F and G have reduced over the period whilst the number of A's and B's have shown a steady increase, though it is fair to say not a significant one in the context of meeting challenging 'net zero' objectives. Properties graded C and D have shown a slight upward trend and those graded E have shown a marked reduction albeit there has been a recent slight upturn which corresponds with the requirement to demonstrate EPCs are at least an E for rental properties from 2020. I have asked officers to send Cllr White a more detailed analysis of the figures on which this brief summary is based.

The Council does of course have more control over its own housing stock, which makes up around 10% of all housing in the Borough. As a result of our long-standing programme of investment in retrofit, RBC housing has achieved an average Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) energy efficiency rating of 74 - better than the national averages of 65 for all housing, and of 69 for social housing. This equates to an average EPC band 'C' for RBC housing compared to the national average of band 'D'. Clearly there is more to do but this is still an impressive record we can be proud of.

As set out in detail in the paper presented to HNL in July 2021, retrofitting our ageing private sector housing stock remains one of the biggest challenges facing Reading (and indeed the rest of the country) in meeting the net zero ambition. We therefore welcome the recent recognition of this challenge in the Government's Heat and Buildings Strategy, and very much hope that the investment needed to bring housing stock up to the requisite energy efficiency standards, which is far in excess of the means available to us locally, will be forthcoming to enable rapid and effective implementation of the Strategy's objectives. Though as ever, I will believe it when I see it, having seen the botched £1.5 billion green home scheme.

This Committee will later consider the Rent with Confidence Scheme and new website. Contained within this report, are our various requirements to enable high-quality private sector housing for Reading. One of those is a landlord needed commitment for enhancing their homes by maximising energy efficiency, striving for a rating of C where possible. We hope many landlords will make this commitment. I hope Cllr White is reassured that this Council is working hard to insulate homes across the Borough.

I look forward to the action plans tracking back to March HNL where we can rightly continue to discuss this important issue.